

The Art of Coaching

Programming is the Science...

Coaching is the Art

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Brian Grasso
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Foreword

By, Alwyn Cosgrove

Regardless of your sport, your training philosophy, whether you coach Little League or taekwon-do, or prefer free weights over machines, the bottom line is that you are a **COACH**.

Putting aside the technical differences between sports for now – in other words - let's leave the science out of it - the difference between a successful program and an unsuccessful one, is quite simply down to coaching fundamentals.

Brian Grasso recognized this. While other coaches were busy debating the minute details of how coaching football is different from coaching figure skating, Brian took a step back and looked at the commonalities between successful coaches and their programs. What separated truly great coaches from the mediocre.

Thus- we have the 'Art of Coaching'

This manual covers step by step **EXACTLY** how to coach for maximum results, maximum success and most of all maximum fun and enjoyment regardless of your sport or training philosophy. Good coaching isn't limited by anything other than the coaching ability of the individual.

We all remember the coach in our youth, who left us on the bench, poked fun at us or had us running laps in the rain. We also remember the coach who inspired us, picked us up and made our young lives a little better.

Which type of coach are you?

Sincerely,

Alwyn Cosgrove

Kaizen Coaching Styles

The Artful & Purposeful Means of Developing a Young Athlete

Instant Gratification

One of my missions with respect to changing the face of youth conditioning worldwide is to make Trainers and Coaches aware of their coaching styles. More over, bring about a conscious and directed change in the way they relate to, teach and coach young athletes.

Many Trainers and Coaches will purchase products and attend seminars that bring about a sort of instant gratification. They learn about speed techniques or strength training methodologies. They learn how to implement these training strategies with their own athletes. Very often, they are even remiss in wanting to learn 'why' a particular methodology is effective, or what the scientific premise is. Instead, they look just for the drills – something they can use effectively here and now in order to reap better success.



Don't let the instant gratification aspects of the adult fitness world seep into the realm of youth athletic development..

That's not altogether a negative. I understand the importance of learning execution-based knowledge. With our time constantly being squeezed by demands from work and home, sometimes the best and most effective thing you can do is look to understand the basics; the stuff that will have an immediate impact on your athletes or team.

Having said that, we have become a 'here and now' culture. We are often looking only for the instant gratification and nothing more. But when passionately developing young athletes, we have to come to an understanding and appreciate the fact that our roles are far more crucial than just teaching the latest speed techniques.

Kaizen – A Way of Life

Our duty as advocates for young athletes is to seek out our own weaknesses and address them. We must use objective analysis as to what we need to improve upon and, through continual and deliberate action, get better and better over time.

That is, in essence, the definition of the word Kaizen –

A long-term approach to bettering an individual, keeping continuous improvement in mind while eliminating waste through empowerment.

The interesting factor is that definition applies to both your journey as a coach as well as the journey you must lead your young athletes through.

Famed college basketball coach, John Wooden, summed up the developmental approach to coaching best –

When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur. When you improve conditioning a little each day, eventually you have a big improvement in conditioning. Not tomorrow, not the next day, but eventually a big gain is made. Don't look for the big, quick improvement. Seek small improvements one day at a time. That's the only way it happens – and when it happens, it lasts."

One of the most crucial comments Coach Wooden makes in that statement is this –
'when it happens – it lasts.'

That is an extraordinary comment on the application of training and developing young athletes.

Divergent Beliefs

Many youth sport coaches infract on the notion that the here and now is the most important. Winning today's game or this weekend's tournament is critical – even when talking about 10 year old soccer. In this case, the coaching style is very much reflective of the need to win. Perfectionist-based tendencies are required during practice and game settings. When they are not received to the level the coach desires, yelling, belittling and negative criticism often pervueys.

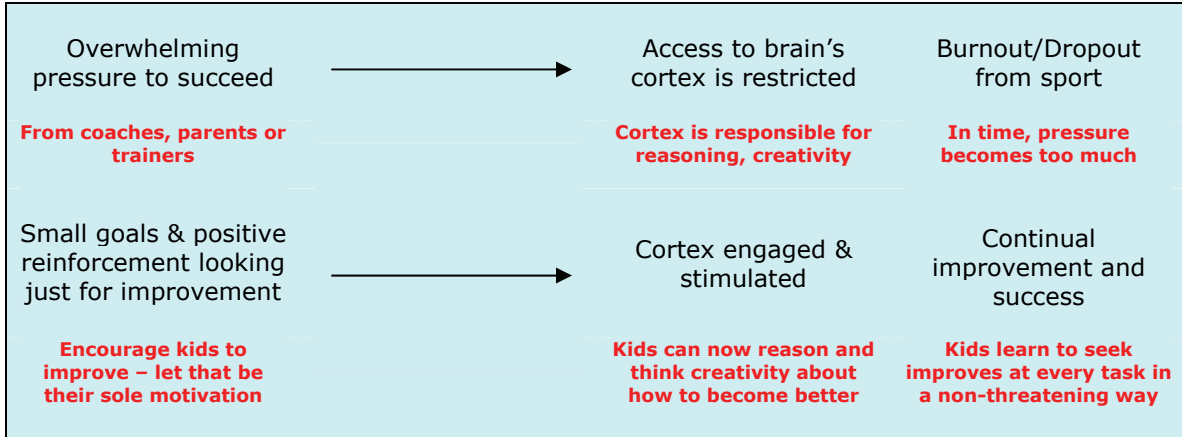
The same holds true for many parents. Demonstrating quality skill level and achieving success are thought of as the most important factors for participating in youth sports. Some parents offer negative feedback, poor critiques or inappropriate comments during the game. The message is clear to the young athlete – Success now is important. In fact, success is the only way I can avoid the negativity.

Trainers and training centers working with young athletes also fall into this category as well. The sales pitch is often made on the notion that improvements in speed, strength and jumping capacity will be both dramatic and immediate.

There is a stark and very real scientific consequence to each of these actions however. Young athletes, although children, still fall under the same physiological

realities as adults. Before I demonstrate the mental fallout that young athletes experience due to the above circumstances however, ask yourself this question –

If my boss responded to me positively only when I was perfect and belittled me when I wasn't, how motivated would I be to continue in my job?



With the second time continual listed above, young athletes are taught over time to search for continual improvement as *the* marker of success. This allows the brain to create new 'software' that can and will be called upon during the lifetime. With this software well entrenched, the cortex is stimulated constantly resulting in an increase of reason and creativity. Although often considered 'artful' mindsets, an improved capacity to think in terms of reason and creativity will allow the young athlete to solve new and more challenging sport-related tasks over time and increase their ability. In fact, research has shown that children who exhibit a higher cognitive capacity are often more able to solve the motor tasks associated with improved sport play. Because they have a history of associating success with improvement, they bypass the burnout/dropout issues that currently face our youth sport culture and adopt a more holistic feeling about sport, fitness and life – one needs to look only at our society to see how problematic this concern has become.

Youth sports and training for youth sports has become an exercise of pressure and fear. Repercussions for poor performance or lack of aptitude are severe. Kids today have lost the joy and innocence of what sport and fitness participation truly is – and that is effecting their lifetime adherence.

Why Dedicate a Book To 'Coaching Science'?

The simple and direct answer?

Because the actual training of young athletes is ***EASY!***

Training young athletes is nothing more than a concept I refer to as Natural Law.

Let's start with pre-adolescents:

My definition of Natural Law states that whatever an organism is prone to do, based on its own natural tendencies, the training stimulus applied to that organism should reflect those natural tendencies.

What do we know about kids aged 6 – 11?

- They want to move and play
- They don't do well in situations of limited physical stimulus
- They are energetic and happiest when allowed to express that energy
- They thrive in settings which allow them to take part in creating the rules and outcomes of each activity

Do you remember playing in the park with your friends growing up? There was little, if any, adult involvement, you set your own rules and ideas for the game(s) you were playing and because of that, were completely engrossed in the experience.

Simply stated – create exercise initiatives that are fun, movement-oriented, inclusive of all levels of athletic ability and allow for the kids themselves to create some of the rules or features of the activity.

This is in part why mini-treadmills, strength training machines and other such static devices are little more than ridiculous for children. It removes their innate mobility/stability interplay potential and completely negates movement and other related motor skill experiences.

That being said, it is the ***ART OF COACHING*** that dictates how much fun and efficacy-based an experience a given training session, practice or sporting experience will inevitably be.

It's Time For A Revolution... Creating Long-Term Plans for Young Athletes

The most common problem facing Trainers & Coaches today with respect to developing young athletes over time, is the ability to plan long-term. The personal training and coaching professions are most typically based on a session-to-session consideration - clients pay per session most often and Trainers create training programs one session at a time. The same is true for coaching sport - most Coaches script out one practice plan at a time, rather than create a relative flow for an entire month or even season.

The problem with this industry standard as it relates to youths and adolescents is that this type of shortsightedness serves to limit the potential gains made by a young athlete. It is not unlike running a business or corporation - when business owners take the time to organize their objectives and action steps for a given month or year, they almost always are successful at implementing the plan. Far too many business owners, Trainers and Coaches feel as though their actions *during* a sales drive, training session or practice is what will lead to positive change, when in fact it is the planning that occurs *before* these actions that accounts for the true gains.

The most common problem facing Trainers & Coaches today with respect to developing young athletes over time, is the ability to plan long-term. The personal training and coaching professions are most typically based on a session-to-session consideration - clients pay per session most often and Trainers create training programs one session at a time.

No one can learn how to create 6 or 12 month plans in a day. It takes time and diligent effort to acquire this skill, but your ability to get better over time will have a direct and positive impact on both your young athletes' success rate as well as your businesses/teams ability to attract new clients. Set an objective for yourself to create a system or plan that allows you to develop long-term and wide-focused agendas for your young athletes. Take several days or weeks if need be to create a system that is streamlined and easy to implement - although you are looking for a comprehensive system, the more basic you make it, the more easy it will be to adhere to.

Start simply. Take a piece of paper and write out where you want your young athletes to be in 4 weeks. Create headings and then just fill in each category. For instance, what skill sets are you working on now? To what degree of competency do you want an athlete or team to be able to demonstrate that skill set in 1-month time? This can also be applied to elite adolescent athletes. Are you working on squat or power clean totals right now? If so, where do you want these numbers to be in 4 weeks?

Once you have organized your thoughts on where you would like to be in 4 weeks, you have to consider how you are going to get there. On the same or a different

piece of paper, right out how many training sessions or practices you have with this athlete or team between now and 4 weeks from now. Date each training session or practice on your piece of paper. Now, using your skills as a Trainer or Coach, literally, just fill in the blanks. Compare where you want to be in 4 weeks with the number of training sessions or practices you have between now and then. In order to accomplish your 4-week goal, what action steps along a critical path must be taken? This is the essence of how to develop a long-term approach to working with young athletes. You will simply just write out your next several training sessions or practices in order to meet the objectives you have laid out for 4 weeks from now.

This system can easily be applied to 6 months or even a year. Just follow the same type of procedure as mentioned above - set out an objective for the time frame and decide where this athlete or team needs to be within that time frame. Let's say you have a 13-year-old athlete for 6 months and you want to determine an objective and critical path. Take out a piece of paper and write out where you want this athlete to be in 6 months. Be descriptive with this - what skill sets do you want him to have mastered? What kind of movement-based techniques will he show great competency in. Once you have decided that, break those large objectives down into more manageable ones and make them your first 4-week objective. To get to your end destination, where do you have to be at the end of this month? From there break it down even farther by deciding on how many training sessions or practices you will have over the course of the next 4 weeks and design them in accordance with your 4 week objective. Next month, do the same thing.

An amazing thing happens when you create objectives and critical plans like this. You will start seeing results in your athletes and teams beyond what you ever-dreamed possible. Failing to plan is one of the biggest concerns facing this industry. It seems everything is taken on a session-by-session basis with no vision or thought to the long-term. It could be argued that individual Trainers and Coaches didn't know how to plan for the future... well, now you do!

Practice the skill of objective writing and critical path creation. It will take time to design a system that flows well for you, but it is more than worth it to your young athletes', teams and your business.

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Understanding Fads... The Art of Philosophy Design

The strength and conditioning industry has rolled with fads, differing methodologies and 'buzz' words for as long as I can remember.

Training strategies and program designs have come in and out of vogue for years and many trainers, me included, often find themselves wrapped up in the 'newest' or 'latest' ideas of how to maximize performance.

As I matured and looked at this industry from variety of different angles, I eventually came to an understanding of what my philosophical vales were pertaining to exercise selection, program design and developmental criteria.

I intend never to stop learning, considering and evolving as a professional... even if that means declaring my views wrong at times. Professionals who hold strongly to one point or philosophy without considering the merits of other training styles are doomed to a marginal career, reaping marginal success.

Very often, young trainers who are just entering this industry will contact me for advice, suggestions or council. Here is my standard series of answers:

Challenge yourself to look outside the box and don't be satisfied about a training philosophy just because someone of significance in the industry happens to believe it.

Be prepared to accept that a great deal of what you learned in college may not prove to be practically applicable.

Try things. Have a means of which to assess their validity and success rate and react to what you see working.

Professionals who hold strongly to one point or philosophy without considering the merits of other training styles are doomed to a marginal career, reaping marginal success.

Learn everything you can, regardless of how silly it seems. Discard what you feel is useless, but your discard should come from a position of understanding and not ignorance.

Systematically create a philosophy that defines you. This philosophy must be dynamic and changeable, but programming and even business strategies are developed based on what you believe philosophically about training and conditioning. Your philosophy will guide everything from your program design and exercise selection to your billing habits.

I believe that quality 'coaching' can make the difference between a good training program and bad training program. Not only are there many training strategies in our industry, but they all claim undeniable success rates.

The POWER LIFTERS believe that the strength gains they create allow for the greatest sporting impact.

The OLYMPIC LIFTERS believe that the speed-strength they develop is far superior and more applicable in that sport is dynamic and most typically played at a high tempo.

The ASSESSMENT FOCUS professionals believe that the body will only function if well aligned and systematically capable - the injuries they work to limit and the holistic nature in which they work towards a systematic congruosity.

The HIGH INTENSITY STRONGMEN believe that the grassroots and 'hard core' style of their training leads to brutal strength gains and develops cognitive toughness and that 'eye of the tiger' mentality.

Two considerations regarding the above points

A. The four examples I gave represent only a small fraction of the industry... there are several more styles and philosophies out there.

B. I see benefit and limitations in all of them.

Without going into great detail about each of the four listed above, the reality is that each respective style can and DOES claim ultimate success rates with their athletes.

It's not that the program design and application doesn't matter, but the ability of the coach to relay a message to a young athlete that is both heard and retained is the real key.

How often do we spend time on learning the newest methods of training...

How often do we spend time on learning the best means of coaching...

More often than not, I error on the side of caution with respect to creating training programs for my young athletes.

One of the things a lot of the Trainers who subscribe to one style of training miss, is that your 'system' or 'philosophy' only extends as far as the athlete you are applying it to. Simply put, YOU may be a HIGH INTENSITY/LET'S KICK SOME BUTT kind of Trainer, but if your teenage athlete is overtired, under fed and lacking sleep (which most teens are), how far is your training style going to go in terms of making that kids successful?

An Average Day...

Let's look at an average day for a young athlete... starting from after school -

High School Soccer Practice - 3:00 - 5:00pm

Because the high school coach doesn't know any better, he runs the kids a ton during the course of practice which is an energy drain and leads to some tissue breakdown.

High Intensity Training Session - 5:30 - 6:30pm

The training session is based on the system/philosophy that the Trainer follows and includes some speed work and heavy lifting. Because of the additional physical stress, the body responds by increasing the release of Cortisol through the blood.

Dinner - 7:00 - 7:30pm

A couple of slices of pizza and some soda. No nutritive value and certainly no aid in restoring the athlete's system.

Homework - 7:30 - 9:30pm

Not only is this exhausting, but it's stressful. This farther stress increases the serum Cortisol levels.

Nigh Life - 9:30 - 11:30pm

Talks on the phone... plays video games... watches TV.

Bed at 12:00am... wake at 5:30am for school.

Cortisol levels increase again and the restorative qualities of sleep are negated. This young athlete walks into another day facing more of the same.

I believe wholeheartedly that young athletes in our culture are significantly overtrained. As a conditioning coach, I made it my obligation to prevent that cycle as best I could by developing a longer-range vision for my training programs.

I base my programs on 4 month factors whenever possible and look for a sequence that resembles the following considerations:

Month 1 - Technique and skill set development. Low to moderate intensity levels.

Month 2 - Advancement of skill sets. Moderate intensity levels.

Month 3 - High intensity levels and periods of overreaching (1 - 3 weeks of overreaching).

Month 4 - Moderate intensity and added restorative considerations in order to reap benefit from last months overreaching.

In this case, my training philosophies have impacted both my program design AND business strategies (4-month program options).

Take out a piece of paper and write out what you believe about training. What are your philosophies and what do you stand for?

Create an 'ideal' training program of 4 - 8 months in duration. It may not have 100% application in practical terms, but what would you do with an athlete if you had everything you needed.

Create an 'ideal' business plan based on several factors. How long would you have your athletes commit to your program for? How many sessions per week would be ideal? What would you charge?

Begin creating a new business plan for yourself that bridges both 'ideals'. You will be amazed at how quickly you can re-create your business and training philosophies by starting with what you would 'ideally' like to do.

*What are your philosophies?
What do you stand for?*



Creating An Opportunity of Success for Your Athletes

Sport psychology gets a fascinating amount of exposure in our industry - how to best motivate athletes. Challenge their innate senses of pride; draw out their inner champions...

That stuff is great when you have a receptive athlete who not only wants to hear what you have to say on that level, but also understands how to respond.

With kids though, the magic bullet doesn't exist. To me, the crux and primary issue of working with young athletes lies in the pedagogical science as much as it does in the training application - maybe more.

Developing relationships with your young athletes is the most powerful thing you can do in the task of helping them create their sporting potential or adhering to a lifetime of physical activity.

It's not about 'beating the drum' through vocal inspiration with all kids. One of the biggest shortcomings I have seen with many coaches and trainers is that they play the 'vocal motivation coach' routine with every athlete they encounter. It's simply not prudent. The same way that not all exercise selection, arrangement or load is a one size fits all equation, so to is the same about the interpersonal relationship building sequence called coaching.

I have organized my thoughts into categories of athletes in order to best describe what I mean -

A. The athlete has low motivation and skill

You know this athlete. Shy, quiet and lacking both confidence and ability (one likely begets the other). This is not the kid that is going to respond to a 'rah, rah - go get 'em' style of coaching!

In my experience, I qualify the coaching style needed in this situation as '**direct**'. Certainly, you take the time to make this young person feel comfortable in your group training setting. More often than not, I do this by speaking very quietly and directly to him/her once I have sent the other athletes on a task. Kids like this typically don't enjoy being 'spoken to' or 'singled out' in front of everyone. That's why I call this coaching style, direct. Direct your questions, suggestions and tasks to this youngster personally so that they do not feel 'on display' in front of the group.

B. The athlete has low motivation but high skill

Here's where the 'rah, rah' coach can be effective. The kid is good - he/she shows great skills and demonstrates wonderful technical ability. I have coached many athletes like this and very often their motivation is lost due to the fact that they lack challenge. Things may have come very easily to this particular athlete and he/she just never felt challenged. The coaching system warranted here I call '**inspire**'.

In a positive and uplifting manner, challenge this young athlete to achieve more. Alter his/her set/rep/sequence design by adding an exercise or increasing the difficulty of the sequence. However, be wary of the young athlete who is talented, but lacks motivation because they simply have no interest in this sport anymore. I

have also come across that scenario many times. A promising, talented kid gets 'bullied' into sports by his/her parents. That's where the interpersonal skill of coaching is key. You have to know whether or not you are 'inspiring' a young athlete who is just looking for a challenge or one is looking for a way out of sports!

C. The athlete has high motivation and skill

Simply put, '**delegate**'. I have seen so many coaches and trainers try to 'corral' athletes made up of these traits - almost like they want to take credit for the child's abilities. Sheltering kids like this and imposing your will and ideas on them is just not prudent. Kids like this need to be part of the decision cycle. Demonstrate and explain exercise selection to them; work at perfecting technical proficiency; have them understand the goals associated with programming - and then include them in creation development.

Kids are smart people. While some need to be 'directed' others can and should be part of the coaching process. Talk to kids like this and get their feedback. Empower them to comprehend matters of technique and exercise progression and then encourage them to work with you on program design.

Now... before the emails pour in questioning me on this... The goal of coaching is to get ALL your young athletes into this category. That is the science and art that I call athletic development. The shy and quiet kid who lacks motivation and skill - artfully find a way to get him/her to this point.

The young athlete who has loads of skill but lacks motivation - artfully find a way to get him/her to this point.

D. The athlete has high motivation but low skill

Your job here is to '**guide**'. They want to do it. They work hard at getting better. They really desire to improve. Guide them. Work hard with them on technical skills. Match their eager dispositions with an equally energetic coaching style dedicated to helping them learning and improve their skill level.

So... there you go. Four different, yet very common athletes, with four very different, yet corresponding coaching styles.

Hopefully this article will help you take a real look at the young athletes you work with and increase your awareness in terms of what they need from you.

Coaching is a beautiful art that you must strive to become better at. Far too often in this industry we look at the scientific parts of conditioning only. With kids, that's simply not enough.

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It's simply not prudent.*

The Art of Coaching - Applied

This is not only common, but almost impossible to avoid. Whenever you bring 2 or more young athletes together, you are bound to see more than one personality type (and therefore need to employ more than one coaching style).

When coaching a group of 2 or more athletes, restrict the tendency to have each of the athletes performing the same drill at the same time. For example, during a standard warm-up for me, my athletes will do some basic ROM activities (typically through the hips and shoulders) and then proceed on to technique skills instruction. Let's say you have a group of 4 athletes. As opposed to each of them performing a hip circuit at the same time and then moving on to the next ROM activity, create 4 different exercises and segment them in such a way so that each athlete is performing a separate drill. To the casual reader, that may sound like a chaotic mess!! In actuality, it allows for a much simpler training session, an individualized approach to coaching and an important feature missing from many basic training sessions - instruction and explanation time.

Here's The Scenario

Athlete 1 (low motivation & skill) - requires a 'direct' method of coaching
Athlete 2 (low motivation & high skill) - requires 'inspire' method of coaching
Athlete 3 (high motivation & skill) - requires 'delegate' method of coaching
Athlete 4 (high motivation & low skill) - requires 'guide' method of coaching

Warm-up Routine

Hip Circuits - 2 sets/leg, 3 reps/exercise
Prone Bridge with Leg Lift - 3 sets, 5 reps/leg
Shoulder Circuit - 3 sets, 4 reps/exercise
Hurdle Walkover - 3 sets, 10 hurdles

Sequence & Flow

First off, bring the whole group together and explain what the task of the day will be. Address each participant individually by name and welcome them. Explain what the training session will look like for the day and encourage verbal and non-verbal compliance.

Then... TEACH!

I have long maintained that every development program must begin with an introductory or assimilation phase for the young athlete. The bulk of your basic teaching should fall into this category. The teaching component at the beginning of each training session should be reminder-based or build off of previously taught skills.

Take 5 - 7 minutes to teach each of the 4 warm-up drills. Explain why the athletes will be performing these drills and why they are important (and yes... do this with even young pre-adolescents. You are building a long-term approach to their development and need to invest the time to acquaint them with your system. Even young kids are 'teachable' given the proper application of stimulus).

Once the teaching time is done, assign them each to an exercise. Now, you have the time to flow and work with each of them individually on correct body alignment, movement habits and exercise adherence. Because they are all doing different things, you can apply the proper style of coaching to each individual.

Application

Athlete 1 (direct) - Hip Circuit
Athlete 2 (inspire) - Prone Bridges
Athlete 3 (delegate) - Shoulder Circuit
Athlete 4 (guide) - Hurdle Walkover

Coaching Cues

Athlete 1 - Get down to his level (which would be on your knees given the 'Hip Circuit') and quietly let him know what a good job he is doing. Ask him if he has any questions about what he is doing. Chances are, if he did have questions, he would not have asked them when the entire group was together. The key here is the tone of your voice - be patient, relaxed and easy-going.

Athlete 2 - 'Seriously Johnny that is even better than last week!' 'Your making this look easy, let me show you a more challenging method, because I know you can do it!' Remember, they have low motivation, but high skill - Encouraging and challenging are good methods to employ.

Athlete 3 - Ask him what he thinks. 'How's it feel?' 'You feeling good with that today or you want to switch it up a little?' 'What do you think we could add to it?' Delegate some of the responsibilities of their training to them and help them make it work. Empower them to seek out and create new ideas.

Athlete 4 - Verbally reward their effort and work to make them understand the movement better. 'That looks great, Sally!' 'Now, you see how your left leg is pointing out to the left when you go over the hurdle? How can we fix that?'

This flow and sequence of coaching can be taken through the entire workout - even through your movement and strength skill portions. Just create and segment the exercises, include a teaching component preceding each portion and apply the appropriate style of coaching to each individual athlete.

Keeping these coaching principals in mind, how do you ensure technical development in your young athletes?

Where To Start

A young athletes' initial exposure to a new technique is critical. It must be presented in such a way that creates intrigue and excitement within the athlete, but does not overexpose him or her to too much information or stimulus all at once - there is a fine line between teaching what is appropriate and can be retained versus what amounts to too much exposure of a given task and its progressions.

The Problem In Youth Conditioning

Too much exposure in the beginning of a training program is counterproductive to an optimal ending. Children can easily become overwhelmed by Trainers, Coaches and Parents when they are taught complex technical skills in one training session or short period of time. The most critical problem in the youth training and sport industry is the overzealousness perpetuated by many Trainers and Coaches (and facilitate by many Parents) in terms of gaining skill in a given technical exercise. We must create visionary-based teaching methods that are scripted and systematically progressive and work towards instilling a lifelong adherence to a particular skill or exercise. Our culture is based on a gratification system - we strive to see results *now* even if the act of trying to create results in the short-term proves to be contradictory to the science of motor development and blatantly less beneficial than a more holistic and long-term approach.

Important Considerations

The following list is a few suggestions to remember when creating an initial lesson plan to teach a new technical exercise:

Speed, Agility, Strength & Sport Skill

Be wary of the current state of fitness your athlete(s) possess. We often look to 'run' our young athletes through new technical exercises without being conscious of how tired they may be getting. This is a common mistake that I see all the time - when the CNS becomes fatigued, attention to technical merit is reduced. It becomes impossible to learn and retain a skill set under the duress of fatigue. Remember that technical development in terms of speed mechanics, agility, strength or a specific sporting skill is a process of systematic acquisition. This acquisition begins with a foundational introduction and is then progressed more specifically to adherence on a very functional level - which includes increases in speed and external environmental considerations such as opponents and teammates.

Emotional Considerations

Young athletes who are bored or too excited will not gain ability in a new technical skill on an optimal level. This is where your ability as a Coach becomes important as does your capacity for creating well-designed lesson plans. When the lesson plan is created with the physical skill and emotional temperament of the athlete in mind, it will have a 'just right' feel to it. Young athletes who lack motivation and skill for example will not respond to being put on display in front of there fellow athletes, nor will they adhere to a skill that is presented too quickly or involving too many progressions. You want each of your young athletes to walk away from your training session perfectly comfortable and happy with what they just learned.

YOUR Physical Ability

Young athletes learn in a variety of manners - one of which is visual. Being able to properly demonstrate an exercise or skill is often crucial to a given athletes ability to comprehend and reproduce that skill. The key to this demonstration however, is the 'relating factor' it has on your athletes. Far too often, Trainers and Coaches will demonstrate a skill in a way that their young athletes can't relate - too fast for example. In one case I have seen, the Trainer actually enjoyed performing skills at

an increased rate as a means of 'showing off' to the athletes he was coaching. Nothing positive is gained from this. Your athletes may admire you but you have not shown them anything of value with respect to their skill development. In whole-part-whole methods of teaching, you certainly want to show what the skill looks like at high speed and with a flawless technical ability, but then you must break the skill down to its finer points and begin teaching from the foundation.

Switch Words – Clarifying Your Coaching Cues

The concept of Switch Words was developed by James Mangan through his 50 years of research on the subject. He published his findings in a book entitled 'Secrets to Perfect Living' in 1963.

Switch words are one-word declarations that enable the subconscious mind to literally 'flip a switch' thereby causing a particular behavior pattern or thought process to ensue. Mangan studied the innate reaction of the brain to carefully selected words and how those words effected action.

In contemporary life, we tend to have inner dialogues with ourselves about everything from goals we wish to accomplish to patterns of thought we wish to suppress. The key to switch words is that a single word, repeated enough, will elicit a more powerful response than would the never-ending cycle of dialogue that plagues many people. The key is that the single word is a more direct and filtered message to the brain. For example:

You lose your car keys and need to leave your house to get to an important meeting right now.

The standard response to this is to search around your house in a frantic state while your inner dialogue sounds something like this –

'Where are they? I have to leave right now or I'm going to be late. Where could they possibly be? Why do I always lose stuff?'

While you are intending to find your keys, the frantic nature and unclear messages you are sending to your brain (random dialogue) are preventing you from finding them in a quick and easy manner.

According to the switch word concept, you would be best to sit down, relax for a second and repeat the word 'Reach'. Reach is a word that Mangan showed to trigger a directed response in your brain for the purpose of finding a specific item (whether that be a lost physical item or misplaced thought).

We also tend to encounter random inner dialogue when we are faced with a negative or stressful situation. For example:

You are presenting a seminar to your peers. This type of life event often causes nervousness and negativity in many people. Your inner dialogue on the day of the presentation can be going nuts with unformed and unclear messages to your brain –

'I hope I don't stink, today. What if I forget what I wanted to say on slide 3? I've got to calm down and just relax. What if I look foolish?'

Although you are trying to calm yourself down and suppress any nervousness, the message to your brain is completely unclear and so no desirable action will occur.

In this situation, the desire to become comfortable and relaxed is being interrupted by your nervous dialogue – your brain is left with too much information to process.

The switch word in this context is 'cancel'. Cancel, repeated quietly, urges your brain to suppress any negative thoughts or feelings. By repeating 'cancel', you will eventually calm yourself down and eliminate stressful feelings – thereby allowing for your positive self-talk to become the dominant thought and emotion.

Although the concept of switch words was not originally developed for use in a sporting or coaching context, I have found it to be wonderfully powerful at generating a focused direction for young athletes in terms of exercise execution.

The simplicity of using one, dominant word to express action has become a cornerstone of my teaching habits.

Coaches often use long and unfocused verbal commands to encourage action or behavior in their young athletes. Again, the beauty and simplicity of switch words can be found in their directed focus and specific instructional bias as a call to action.

When coaches or trainers want their athletes to run faster, the command is often:

'Come on... get there... let's go'

When coaches or trainers want their athletes to jump higher, the command is often:

'Get off the ground... get up there'

The fundamental problem is that there is an unfocused and unclear agenda being levied towards the young athletes. More over, there is often a great deal of inconsistency – the cues a coach uses on Monday to instruct an athlete to run faster, is different than the cue the coaches uses on Tuesday. No direct correlation can be made in the brain of the young athlete and therefore no subconscious action will occur.

Below is a table of desired actions and words I have used effectively as coaching cues – consistently with my young athletes. These words represent the best and most directed means by which to relay a specific and clear objective:

<u>Desired Action</u>	<u>Switch Word</u>
Skipping or expressing rhythm	FLOW
Producing force	THROUGH or DRIVE
Speed of reaction	FIRE
Running faster	HIT
Gaining range of motion	BIG
Increasing torso strength	BRACE
Expressing a powerful burst in sequence	BOOM
Jumping higher	THROUGH or EXTEND
Maintaining balance	EASY
Performing an Olympic lift	PULL or BANG

Use these switch words when coaching or teaching young athletes. Be consistent with your delivery and talk to your athletes about which words 'feel' best to them.

About the Author

Brian Grasso is considered one of the premier experts on youth athletic development in the world.

Brian currently serves as Executive Director for the International Youth Conditioning Association (IYCA). The IYCA is a group of sport training and sport medicine professionals from across North America who have recently released the first and only certification with respect to youth athlete development. Visit www.IYCA.org for more information.

A well-known, respected and outspoken leader within the youth athletic development industry, Brian has written feature articles for sport training magazines throughout North America including, Men's Fitness, Men's Health, SportingKid, American Track & Field and Personal Fitness Professional. Brian also contributes to the monthly British sport training publication, Successful Coaching.

Brian began his sport-training career as a Performance Coach to Olympic, professional and elite athletes. He has worked with several professional and Olympic athletes from a variety of sports, and has traveled extensively throughout North America and Europe as a Conditioning Consultant for both the Canadian and United States National Team athletes.

Based upon his work in sport performance training, Brian has been interviewed and profiled by media throughout North America including, ABC News, Chicago Parent, The San Francisco Chronicle, MSNBC.COM, CLTV, WRNJ 1250AM, The Daily Herald & The FAN590 AM.

"Listening to Brian Grasso speak about the development of athleticism in the youth population is comparable to listening to the most exciting professor you ever had in college. He literally brings to life his passion for correctly training our young athletes. He knows how to train. Even more importantly, he is able to mentor others in the proper progressions of intensity, duration, frequency and exercise selection."

Danny O'Dell, MA, CSCS*D

"Right now, there is no man in the industry who is more trusted to instill youth training properly than Brian Grasso. He is an amazingly engaging speaker whose passion for his work is so warm and genuine that he wins you over immediately. His exceptional experience, imagination, and insight in all avenues of training have made him one of my most invaluable resources."

**Sean Hyson
Editor - Men's Fitness**

"One of the most vibrant speakers on the national circuit today - Brian Grasso delivers solid information that excites, entertains and educates the audience. His presentation skills are surpassed only by his in-depth knowledge. He's the Michael Jordan of his field."

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